

The M1 Rifle and Silver Horseshoes

A Tale of The Wimbledon Cup and The Farr Trophy¹ circa 1957

By Dick Culver

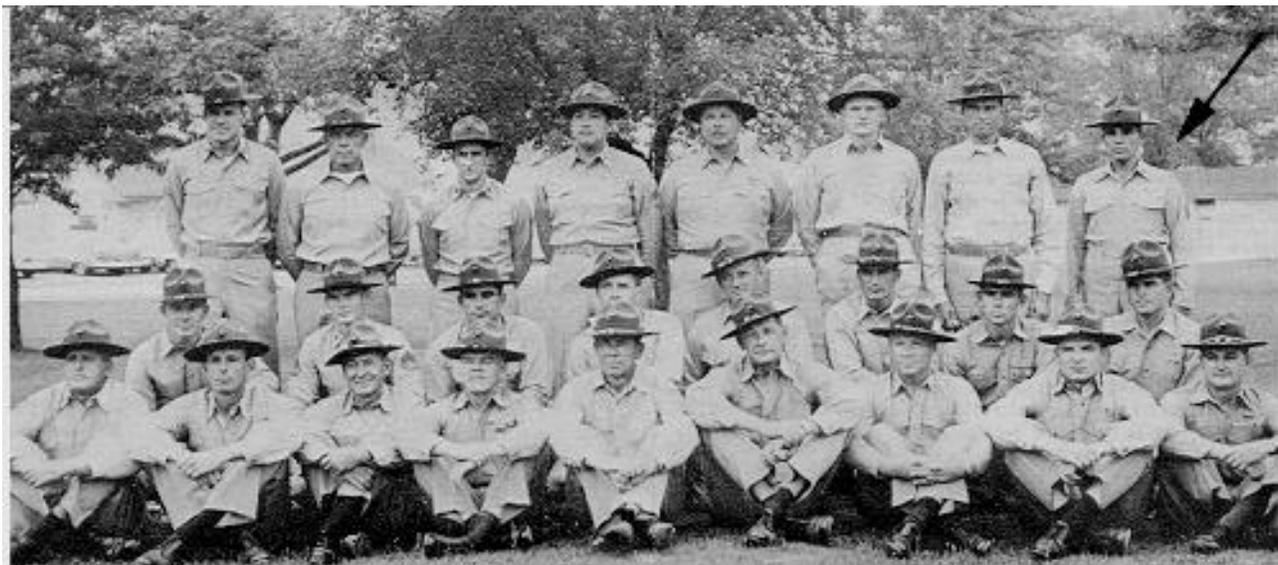
Time frame: August 1957

Location: Camp Perry, Ohio

Range: Vialé (then called Vaile and pronounced "Vail")

Match: Wimbledon Cup/Farr Trophy

I was a very young Sergeant assigned to shoot for the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Rifle Team that Summer of 1957. I had applied for, and been selected to shoot with some of the most notable shooters of the day. I lived in awe of these gentlemen, and felt more like I should be spit-shining their boots rather than shooting along side of them. But it is often said that God often looks after dogs, small children and Marines--in this instance, I'm inclined to agree!



RESERVE'S TOP SHOTS—The Marine Corps Reserve Rifle Team gathered at Camp Perry, Ohio, for this family-style photo during the National Matches. From left, top row: Cpl. Billy Sparks, WO Norman C. Studt, Cpl. James H. Rogers, SSgt. Jesus Camarillo, Jr., Cpl. Josiah C. Blackford, LtCol. Orin H. Allman, Major Richard J. Hardaway and Sgt. Richard O. Culver, Jr., Middle row: Lt. Donald M. Jacobson, SSgt. Robert D. Jacobson, Sgt. Hal C. Ehrenfeld, SSgt. Paul V. Brothers, Major Forest W. Clark, Lt. Charles P. Coleman, Lt. Robert D. Howe, and Lt. James M. Smith. Front row: Lt.Col. Richard Tonis, LtCol. Phil Roettinger, LtCol. Leland C. McAuley, Col. Emmet O. Swanson, LtCol. James H. Christopher, Major William H. Jordan, Major Donald Olive, Major Albert Schindler, and Capt. Joseph D. Eddlemon, (Photo by SSgt. J. Heard.)

The Reserve Team arrived at Camp Perry one at a time, and occasionally in twos and threes. I had been selected to shoot with both the Pistol and the Rifle, so I was already there when the rest of the rifle team arrived. The only other pistol shooter who stayed over with me was a Staff Sergeant named Paul Brothers. Since I already had a "hut" from the Pistol Match and my rack was made, I only had to check in with the arriving rifle team. My next stop was to draw my Match M1 from the USMCR Van. I was handed my fowling piece and told it was a good shooting rifle (just **HOW** good I was to find out later). We had absolutely NO dope on these things, and I had not fired in a rifle match since Camp Perry the year before. I had fired

for annual re-qualification, but had done no match shooting for a whole year. ...AND I had never fired at 1000-yards.

In those days, almost every one at the Nationals shot the GI-issue ammunition that was handed out on the firing line. It was, of course, required to use this ammo in the National Trophy Matches. When the long-range matches were fired with bolt guns, the shooters used commercial ammunition (Remington, Winchester, etc.), but out to about 600-yards when shooting the service rifle, issue GI Match was the ammunition of the day.

Once the USMCR Rifle Team had all reported, we were sent to a National Guard Range in Akron, Ohio to get some rudimentary zero on our new rifles. Most of the old timers only needed a round or two to get on target at 200 yards. After that, their extensive experience would allow them to use "come-ups" learned from prior experience to be zeroed for subsequent range - essentially they sighted their rifles in as they progressed from yard line to yard line. Me? I was sweating bullets (sorry for the pun), as I needed all the practice I could get, plus my wind reading wasn't up to par after a year's lay off.

We had such notables on our team as our Team Captain, Col. Emmet O. "Doc" Swanson, (Triple Distinguished and noted International Champion). Col. Swanson was a dentist in civilian life, hence the sobriquet "Doc". Doc was the most gentlemanly of individuals. Another notable shooting personality on the team was Bill Jordan, author of *No Second Place Winner*, legendary Border Patrol Inspector and fast draw expert. Bill was a Marine Corps Distinguished Marksman, and would go to Perry to shoot pistol for the Border Patrol. Bill would then stay over after the Pistol Matches to shoot rifle for the Marines every year. We also had Lt. Colonel Phil Roettinger - both Roettinger and Jordan came close to topping 6' 6" in height, I felt like a midget! Roettinger reputedly was a CIA agent when he wasn't serving as a Marine Reserve Lt. Col. Phil was said to weigh in at 157-lbs with a pocket full of rocks and his buddy, Bill Jordan, often described him as looking like a "tuning fork" when he shot offhand! Then there was Lt. Col. Dick Tonis, a Massachusetts State Police Captain and noted hard-nosed individual. If rumors were to be believed, Colonel Tonis was best avoided like the plague by the youngsters, lest they be cuffed and searched!

A quiet, good-humored Marine officer, Major Al Shindler, took me under his wing and kept me out of major trouble. Al would eventually take over the Reserve Team, a position he held for a number of years. Another disarmingly good-natured team member was Major Don Olive, who in his civilian guise, ran a CIA operation out of Florida. In retrospect, it would seem that our team was composed of old time shooting champions, spooks, law enforcement officers and one wet nosed kid, barely able to keep from shooting himself in the foot. With such a noteworthy crew, I felt extremely insignificant! I attached myself to Bill Jordan as his personal "bat-man" (to use British jargon) and followed him around making sure he wanted for nothing, so I could listen to his stories. Needless to say, I got a real education! What fine gentlemen these folks were as a role models for a fledgling young sergeant!

In later years, Don Olive laughingly told me when we were shooting the Division Matches at Camp Lejeune in the mid-1960s, that the old timers on the team in 1957 had a bet that I would never get commissioned in the Marines after I had inadvertently shot as a team member on the 2nd Army ROTC Rifle Team, challenging the USMCR Team in the same match. How I came to shoot for the 2nd Army Rifle Team while serving as a Marine Buck Sergeant is another rather funny story, but that is best left for another occasion. It had to do with a Retired Marine General, his son (a former National Junior Rifle Champion), and

the General's daughter, and it was the only time I ever remember Colonel Swanson using less than gentlemanly language!

Now that I've set the stage with some background on our team personalities, it's time to get back to the Wimbledon Cup and 1000-yard M1 shooting. Basically (since the Corps was paying our entry fees), we were required to shoot all individual matches regardless of (our) experience. Having never fired at a 1000-yard target, I was somewhat at a loss as to what to use for elevation. By now I had 600-yard dope, but that was all. I was too embarrassed to ask the old-time hard-holders for their advice. I was masquerading as a seasoned rifle shooter, but looking back, most of the old timers were humoring me and letting me make my own mistakes unless I chose to ask questions.

I stood (casually) next to every group of shooters who seemed to be discussing 1000-yard shooting techniques. By listening to about 6 or 7 pieces of advice from different groups, (like Bob Hope listening to the "gun-fighting advice" in the movie *The Paleface* - "he crouches when he shoots so stand on your toes," ~or~ "he limps to the left when he walks, so lean to the right," and other such sage pieces of information), I came away still scratching my head as to a come-up from 600 to 1000 yards. More confused than ever, I headed for the firing line leaning slightly to the right while walking on my toes.

We were fortunate in 1957 to have our first batch of "modern" National Match Ammunition, some stuff called "Frankford Arsenal T 291". This ammo was essentially the reincarnation of the M1 Match Ball load from before WWII. It used the old 172/173-grain bullet, had similar velocities to the pre-WWII match ammunition and was carefully manufactured for consistency and quality. Although FA 72 would not become a reality until the following year, the T 291 came in the familiar red, white and blue FA Ammo Box (wish I'd have saved a box of that stuff for posterity!). This T 291 shot so well that it was adopted as the standard match load for the Nationals in 1958 and was designated FA 72 which became the de-facto match .30-'06 load until FA and LC ceased production some years later. In 1956, a "Centennial Round" had been produced and small quantities were issued as souvenirs at the Nationals (some were even nickel-plated), but not in large quantities. At any rate, the T 291 issued in 1957 brought service rifle match shooting into the modern era.

I was assigned to the "small end" of Vialé Range (Remember, we called it "Vaile" Range then) to fire somewhere in the 1st five targets (I don't recall the exact target number, but Target "4" sticks in my memory). This was the greatest of good fortune for two reasons:

- 1) It is much easier to count over from the 1st target to yours on the "small end of the line" to make sure you don't shoot on the wrong target (don't laugh)! The bloody things had 2 foot "duce wings" on each side of the 6' frames in those days, to make it easier to stay on paper when the wind was really difficult. These "wings (which were hung on each end of your target carrier almost literally touched the target next to yours). From the 1000-yard line, it looked like one solid buff colored target stretching from the 1st target on the small end of the line to the last one on the far right, with only the number boards to distinguish each individual target. To add insult to injury, in those days every number board on Vialé Range was black with white numbers. There were no alternating color patterns like there are today. A shooter squadded in the center of the line really had his work cut out for him making sure he didn't put a shot on the wrong target! Mercifully, being that close to the small end of the line made the job manageable, especially for a 1000-yard novice!

- 2) Being on the small end of the line had one other important advantage. Shooters there got to fire in a so-called "wind tunnel" where their bullets were less effected by wind than the shooters in the center of the line or on the high end! The fence dividing the Erie Ordnance Depot from Camp Perry had a growth of grass and shrubs along the chain link fence that helped to block the wind. Since a nasty fishtail wind was blowing that day, the wind advantage there was pretty significant. We "non-practicing Odinists" would take every advantage we could get!

As the match began, the T 291 Ammunition was issued to each scorekeeper and the targets were run up in the air for the prep time. I was primarily worried about elevation and figured that I'd watch the strike of the bullets on targets on either side of mine to see if there was a strong wind blowing from either side. It never occurred to me to "scope" the wind; this kind of postgraduate work would come later in my somewhat "spotty and occasional shooting career." I was most literally a babe in the woods that August morning in 1957.

Finally the targets went down to end the prep period and then came back up ready for my very first 1000-yard shot. I cranked on enough elevation on the sight to make my rifle look like I was shooting a "shoulder-mortar" and my butt plate seemed to almost be in the dirt. I didn't have a shooting mat, only an M49 spotting scope, a shooting stool, a score book (we didn't call 'em data books then) and a carbide lamp.

My heart was in my mouth as I lined the sights up for my first shot. I was hoping I wouldn't hit Canada with all that elevation. I took the obligatory two breaths, let half of the last one out and took up the slack. Although it wasn't all that hot, I felt sweat breaking out on my forehead. "Bam"... the first round went down range somewhere to my right and every eye on the line looked for "the" target to go down. Yep, he caught paper and the target disappeared into the pits. It came back up and was centered, but a bit low, lulling me into thinking the wind was essentially nil. I realigned my sights and again prepared to shoot, now confident that there was nothing evil blowing downrange. My first shot cracked, but I didn't feel the recoil as I quickly looked into the scope to see what Allah had wrought. Miracle of miracles, the target went into the butts! I kept my fingers crossed that it was MY shot that knocked the target down, and not someone cross firing on my target. Nobody cursed and the target came up with a black spotter showing slightly high in the tray ring at 11 o'clock. Heck, not only had I hit my target, I hadn't even wandered onto the "duce wings!"

I corrected for the shot and reloaded. My second shot was a wart four at 3 o'clock. I came left 2 clicks and fired again for my first shot for record - **Wa-Hoo!** A center five in the 20" V-ring (the black was 36" in those days). I continued to shoot, basically ignoring everyone else. If my shots would favor one side of the bull or the other, I simply chased the spotter back to the center with what I considered to be wise and resourceful windage moves! Ha! If I had only known?

I finished fairly quickly, as those who are innocent and have the luck of the Irish running with them frequently do. When I checked with the score keeper I had leaked four rounds out of the black for a total score of 96 with 12-Vs. I didn't think that it was a particularly stellar performance, but a small crowd had begun to gather behind me. Why were they watching me? What had I done wrong? Was my fly unbuttoned? I was still looking for my "faux pas" when one of the old timers came over to me and said, "great shooting kid! - what were you using for wind?" I looked at the nice gentleman kinda' funny and said, "Wind? What wind?" This guy looked at me in total disbelief, shook his head and walked off. I gathered up my gear

and headed back in the direction of Commercial Row, while checking my fly and still not knowing what I had done.

I struck up a conversation with some other team members and they too were telling me that it was a great string. Now I was REALLY confused - my idea of a great string would have been a score of 100 with 20-Vs. They informed me that the wind was truly nasty down there and only the most astute had been able to keep up with it. Hummm--I shook my head sagely, thanked them and started to stow my gear, I was afraid to tell them that I had simply been chasing the spotter, **NOT** truly doping the wind! Gasp, I thought, what if they ever find out?

While my score was not to my satisfaction, after hearing the sad stories of the other big guns, I started nodding sagely and agreeing that the wind was really rough out there today and it really took a lot of concentration to keep up with it²!

I DID place in the Wimbledon that day. This was before the relay winners advanced to a shoot-off to make sure each group of shooters had a more or less even chance at the prize--at that time it was strictly luck of the draw! Then the high man took the marbles and I was lucky as all get out to come away with any kind of place award. In fact, placing in the Wimbledon with a service rifle was a bit trickier than it sounds, as telescopes and bolt guns were allowed in that match as well. Here, an M1 Rifle (they did not have glass bedding in those days) was shooting even against heavy-barreled Model 70 Winchesters with Lyman Super-Targetspot scopes and commercial match ammunition. After all, the Wimbledon was and is considered to be the premier long range match in the United States. It turns out that T/Sgt. Jim Hill (he went on to win an Olympic silver medal) had beaten me out for the Farr Trophy with a 98, even though he had a mere 8-Vs. With a bit more chutzpa I might have asked him why he didn't watch the wind a bit closer, I suppose, but Miz Culver didn't raise any damn fools! The Farr Trophy in that era was simply awarded to the high scoring individual who fired the Wimbledon Trophy Match with a service rifle, with no further place awards. You either won the darned thing, or you didn't.

Comments on the 36" Bullseye and the Farr Trophy:

The Farr and Wimbledon Trophy Matches were fired on the 36" 1000-yard bullseye with its 20" V-Ring until 1975. This target was first used in 1922 (coinciding with the first Farr Trophy Match), and it continued to be the long range ("C"); target for 1000-yard competition through 1974, when it was finally supplanted by the "new fangled" 10X target in 1975. Allowing for the seven years that the Nationals were not fired due to a lack of funds during the great depression (1932, 1933, 1935 - 1939), and including an additional 10 year period from 1941 though 1950 (due to WWII and the start of the Korean War), the Farr Trophy was awarded 36 times for scores fired on the 5-V "C" target prior to the adoption of a 10-X target. During those 36 years a perfect score won the Farr Trophy only 12 times. By 1974, rifles and ammunition, along with shooting gear, had improved significantly, but through most of these 36 National Match years, service rifle shooters were using "real battle rifles," not today's less-than-minute of angle, heavy-barreled service rifles. With the service rifles of the day, the 36" bulls-eye wasn't as easy a mark as it might seem.

As an aside I have always been convinced that if I *HAD* known my exact zero on that M1 in 1957, I might not have hit paper with the thing at 1000-yards. Since I wasn't truly reading

the wind, I simply lucked onto a compromise windage setting that allowed me to get on paper, and the wind in my little "wind tunnel" was not tricky enough to throw this old "spotter-chaser" out of the black except occasionally. Ah well, those were some fine days, and lots of fun. I love shooting 1000-yards, but I'm humble enough to know Odin had a kindly spot in his heart for this wayfaring young Marine some 45-years ago!

ROC

¹ The Farr Trophy was named for the exploits of George R. (Dad) Farr, a 62-year old Washington State Team member in 1921 who drew a Springfield NM Rifle from the armory, got some 600-yard dope on his rifle and headed for the 1000-yard firing line to shoot the Wimbledon Cup Match. Using issue ammunition, Farr caught paper with his first sighting shot, fired a 5 (bullseye) on his second, and ran a total of 71 consecutive bullseyes only dropping out of the black when he ran out of daylight. When offered a chance to buy his borrowed rifle from the Army for cost (\$41.55), he did not have the money. The rest of the civilian teams chipped in and bought the rifle for him along with a case of ammunition. They also bought a beautiful silver cup to be presented to the high rifle shooter in the Wimbledon Cup Match shooting the highest score using a service rifle (as opposed to a match rifle) in subsequent years. The only man to beat him in that September day in 1921 was a Marine Sergeant, John Adkins, who fired 76 consecutive bullseyes using a heavy barreled, scope sighted, Springfield target rifle. Adkins dropped his last shot due to a pulled shot, not an absence of light. The performance of Adkins and Farr caused the shooting community to place a "V" Ring in the long range targets to avoid time consuming shoot-offs in future competition. The Farr Trophy remained the "Service Rifle Sub-Set" of the Wimbledon Cup until it eventually was set aside as a separate match in 1979, albeit still fired at the same time as the Wimbledon.

² I had been researching T/Sgt. Michael Pieterforte's perfect score of 250 with 26-Vs in the National Trophy Individual Match at Camp Perry in September of 1958. Mike fired the 1st perfect score ever recorded in match competition with the M1 Rifle that summer, and the particulars had begun to fade into history. Having been commissioned in 1958, I missed shooting that year and did not get to witness one of the world's landmarks in shooting excellence. A friend sent me some very fuzzy burned pages from the Leatherneck Magazine from a Fall Issue of 1958, chronicling Mike's accomplishment. While reading the entire article, it seems I was luckier than I had remembered! Quoted from *Leatherneck* is the following paragraph:

"Another problem is weather. Example: During the 1000-yard Wimbledon Cup Match the year before (i.e. 1957), the wind was so strong that shooters ran out of windage and had to aim at the bull's eye three targets away to hit their own bull. Some targets were blown away during the match and others were destroyed in the target frames!"

No wonder the guy who asked me how much wind was blowing shook his head and walked off... As the title suggests, *"The M1 Rifle and Silver Horseshoes!"*